



Echo Valley / A Guiding Dilemma

Shipsides, D. (Author). (2008). Echo Valley / A Guiding Dilemma. Artefact, .
<http://www.derryvoid.com/exhibitions/2008/Dan-Shipsides/index.htm>

[Link to publication record in Ulster University Research Portal](#)

Publication Status:

Published (in print/issue): 20/05/2008

Document Version

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

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DAN SHIPSIDES - Touchstone landscape text 1

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Part A

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One of the things I was interested in early on - thinking about your trekking activity in dramatic places such as the Andes - was your sense of landscape. I was intrigued then to find out that landscape just really didn't matter.

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It doesn't. The atmosphere and environment is different – it's different going through a jungle kind of situation or a cave as apposed to outside on the side of a mountain. But I suppose the landscape to me is just the underfoot terrain and as long as that is varied and not too monotonous it's fine. It doesn't make a great deal of difference and descriptions of landscape don't mean an awful lot to me. Though they're not totally meaningless – it's good to know there's a range of mountains around. You know, you're sort of curious to know what the geography is – up to a point. But it doesn't become a vivid part of my experience by any means. It's just information.

So it's not like a postcard image that people might describe to you that makes any sense?

Well it makes sense in that I could draw the postcard scene after the description – but it doesn't impinge on my experience in the way that a sighted person could be walking through a landscape and looking at some fabulous landscape, horizons and mountains – you know the pleasure in that – obviously that doesn't translate just by the description.

It could translate a bit if you were a very good writer – you know – but that's not what happens when you're out walking or climbing – people are just telling you what's around.

When we were in Spain , I was wondering about that quite a lot. You know - if it made any difference whether we went climbing at the sea crags with all the ugly developments nearby or whether we went up into the mountains as we did later for a few days.

Well the mountains were more of a pleasure – they were quieter and you could still smell the sea blowing up from the coast as well as the trees. So it makes some difference – and we came across other people climbing at Sella which added to the atmosphere.

And the whole experience of the day – the drive up into the mountains, the villages, the cafés and food, the bike museum and the walk-ins to the rocks became all very much part of it for me. And the day at Echo Valley where you could hear the echoes – and the sun then heavy rain. That place was very very quiet – nobody around.

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Part B

What about the landscape experience on the longer treks for charity - you know when you're out for 8 or 9 days.

I know for me – walking – you know you're not getting the connection with the landscape. You know it's great to be out in the fresh air – it's good to be away from the hum-drum routine and all the rest of it – and no phone but you don't really get connected with the landscape. And there's something frustrating to know that you've just walked through or down a vast valley and everyone else is crapping themselves about the sheer drop and the beauty of the snow capped mountains and all the rest of it. But that actually didn't mean a thing to me – it was fresh air – which is grand itself but...

There was once, actually in Thailand , where there were caves – you know vast caves – it

took you know half an hour to an hour to get through. It was pitch dark – so everyone had no more than just a wee head light and it was very unnerving for most – you know most of the sighted people found it very unnerving and felt restricted by it – whereas I was very comfortable. It was interesting because the whole temperature in the place was amazing - when you've gone in from moist humid weather into this really cool rock chamber - the sort of drip-drip from the stalactites and all of that. I can remember that as an experience which was a very different environment – so that was a real felt experience being in the cave. But outside it's pretty much of a much-ness.

WHAT ABOUT THE LANDMINES IN VIETNAM ?

I didn't get to Vietnam that time – the bird flue stopped us going.

OH I THOUGHT IT WAS THE LANDMINES THAT PUT YOU OFF!

Well yes the landmines put me off as well....

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